



C O L U M N I S T S

New Stories about Old Chess Players

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Early World Rankings

Quite a bit of ink has been spilled over the issue of which players should be considered world champions before the title became official in 1886. It is a matter of opinion as to when and if we should consider such players as Philidor, Carlier, Bernard, Deschappelles, Labourdonnais, Saint Amant, Staunton, Anderssen, Kolisch, Zukertort, and Steinitz (before 1886) to be world champions.

However, I have never seen anyone discuss the question of the first player to be declared, say, the third best player in the world, implying some ranking system more refined than “World Champion vs. the Rest of the World.” Like most chess players, I am obsessed with rankings, and somehow this obsession carries over into chess history as an attempt to look for early rankings of players. Surprisingly, the first references I could find were not to famous players (such as McDonnell being the second best after Labourdonnais), but to almost complete unknowns!

The first reference I have to a player being third in the world (technically, one of the top three) is from a book by Rebecca Harding Davis called *Bits of Gossip*, published in 1904. The book is available [online](#) as a document of the American South. On pages 44-45, she talks of being visited by Ralph Waldo Emerson in Philadelphia, and being told by him:

“So Philip Randolph is gone! That man had the sweetest moral nature I ever knew. There never was a man so lacking in self-consciousness. The other day I saw in the *London Times* that the American, Randolph, one of the three greatest chess-players in the world was dead. I knew Philip intimately since he was a boy, and I never heard him mention the game. I did not even know he played it. How fine that was!” he said, walking up and down the room. “How fine that was!”



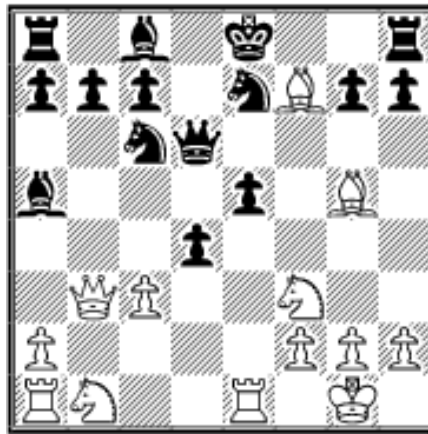
I was unable to find any such story in the *London Times* (currently Sunday

London Times issues are not available online). Clearly, a story like this must have appeared in some paper, since Randolph was a strong chess player and Emerson must have read this somewhere. I could not find any obituaries of Philip Physick Randolph, who was born Oct. 26, 1824 and died on May 5, 1869, except for the one reprinted in *Chess in Philadelphia*, taken from the *Evening Bulletin* of May 7, 1869. Randolph was a well-regarded member of Philadelphia society. Emerson includes Randolph in a list of what he calls “my men” in his journals. Randolph’s father Jacob was a prominent doctor who died at the age of 39, when Philip was 11. Randolph’s maternal grandfather, Philip Syng Physick, has been called “the father of American surgery,” and was physician to Andrew Jackson during his presidency.

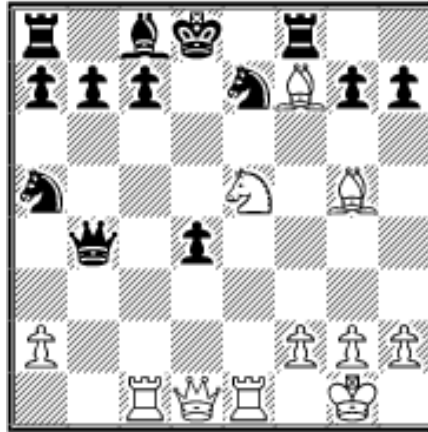
Randolph was a strong local player, even if he was not really one of the top three players in the world. According to the book of the first [American Chess Congress](#), Randolph won a very large majority of games against Hammond, a strong player from Boston, in 1846 or ‘47. This led to a correspondence match between Philadelphia, represented by Randolph and Tilghman, and Boston, conducted by Hammond, which Philadelphia won 1½-½. Randolph was part of the Philadelphia team which defeated New York 2-0 in 1856-7, as well as the team which beat New York 1½-½ in 1858. According to the *Evening Bulletin* obituary, Randolph stopped playing chess after 1858, though he still followed the game.

Thanks to chess historian Neil Brennen, I have two individual games of Randolph, from the book *Chess in Philadelphia*. Neither exactly indicates world-class talent.

Gustavus Reichhelm - P.P. Randolph, Philadelphia CC, 1864 (notes from the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* of February 20, 1864, unless stated otherwise):
1.e4 e5 — The only game we ever had the pleasure of playing with Mr. Randolph. In 1863 we were regarded as a coming player, and Mr. Randolph, being interested, made a special visit to the Club to break a lance with us. Being made acquainted with the fact that the Evans Gambit was our favorite attack and desiring to see our game at its best, Mr. Randolph volunteered to conduct the defense against us. (Reichhelm in *Chess in Philadelphia*)
2.Nf3 Nc6 3.Bc4 Bc5 4.b4 Bxb4 5.c3 Ba5 — The retreat to this square, we think, compromises Black’s game. This game should not, however, be taken as an index of Mr. Randolph’s strength, as he is actually one of the strongest players in the country.
6.d4 exd4 7.0-0 d6 — If 7...Nf6, White would, of course, answer with 8.Ba3, obtaining an almost overwhelming attack, and ...Bxc3 or ...dxc3 would give the attack too much time.
8.Qb3 Qf6 9.e5 dxe5 10.Re1 Nge7 — We see nothing better for Black.
11.Bg5 Qd6 — If 11...Qg6 12.Bxe7 Nxe7 (12...Kxe7 13.Nxe5 Nxe5 14.Rxe5+ winning the bishop) 13.Qb5+ Nc6 14.Nxe5 etc.
12.Bxf7+

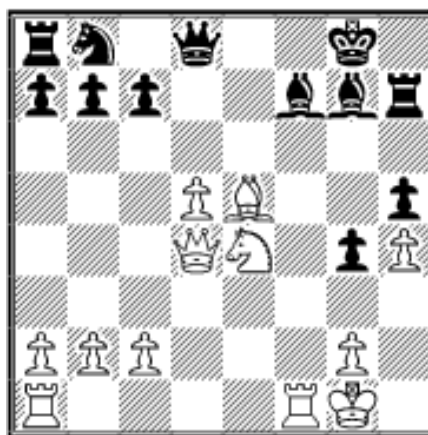


12...Kd8?? — *Fritz8* indicates 12...Kf8 was the only chance. **13.Nbd2! Bxc3 14.Ne4 Na5 15.Qd1** — The only move to keep up the attack; for, had White incautiously played Qc2, Black would have answered with ...Bf5. **15...Qa3** — The best move, as here the queen is less liable to attack. **16.Nxc3 Qxc3 17.Nxe5** — The coup de grace. **17...Rf8** — There is nothing better. **18.Rc1 Qb4**

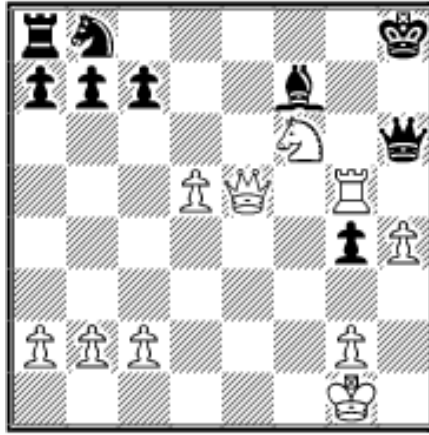


19.Rc4 — Black's whole line of play was dangerous to himself, and presumably so, for the purpose of testing our capacity for attack. The win is now forced. (Reichhelm in *Chess in Philadelphia*) **19...Nxc4 20.Qxd4+ Qd6 21.Bxe7+ Kxe7 22.Nxc4+ Kxf7 23.Nxd6+ cxd6 24.Qd5+ Kg6 25.Re3 Bf5 26.Rg3+ Kf6 27.Qxd6+ Kf7 28.Qc7+ 1-0**

Randolph – C. Vezin, offhand game, 1847 (notes by Gustavus Reichhelm, unless stated otherwise): **1.e4 e5 2.f4 exf4 3.Nf3 g5 4.h4 g4 5.Ne5 h5 6.Bc4 Nh6 7.d4 d6 8.Nxf7 Nxf7 9.Bxf7+ Kxf7 10.Bxf4 Bh6 11.0-0 Kg7 12.Nc3 Be6** — Faulty. 12...c6 is better. **13.d5 Bf7 14.Qd4+ Kg8 15.e5 dxe5 16.Bxe5 Rh7 17.Ne4 Bg7??** — *Fritz8* thinks Black has reasonably good defensive chances after 17...Nd7. The text allows Randolph a forced win, which he misses.



18.Ng5?! — Instead *Fritz8* gives 18.Bxg7 Rxg7 19.Nf6+ Kh8 20.Qe3! (threatening 21.Qh6+) 20...Rg6 21.Qe5 Qf8 (or 21...Rg7 22.Rf5 with the same idea) 22.Rf5 Qg7 23.Rxh5+ Rh6 24.Rxh6+ Qxh6 25.Rf1 Qg7 26.Rf5 Qh6 27.Rg5+—



and mate (e.g. 28.Qe8+ Bxe8 29.Rg8#) or ruinous material loss is inevitable.

18...Bxe5 19.Qe4 — A fine move, followed by a masterly touch. **19...Rg7** — *Fritz8* indicates the best try was 19...Bd4+!? 20.Qxd4 (if 20.Kh1 Rg7! holds, the difference being that if 21.Rxf7 Rxf7 22.Nxf7 as in the game, Black has 22...Qxh4# in reply.) 20...Qxd5, though then after 21.Qc3 Nc6 22.Rad1 Qc4

23.Nxh7 White is still winning. **20.Rxf7 Rxf7 21.Nxf7 Kxf7 22.Qh7+ Ke8 23.Qg8+ Ke7 24.Qe6+ Kf8 25.Rf1+ Kg7** and Black mated in three moves. *Chess in Philadelphia*, Game #13, p. 67-68.

Thus Philip Randolph. The first player said to be in the top four of the world is also quite obscure in chess terms, though in another way he was something of a celebrity in his own time. The following quote is from *Living Age*, February 18, 1854, page 355. Note that by this time in chess history, we can consider many players with strong credentials: Anderssen, von der Lasa, Szén, Harrwitz, Staunton et al.

“The Bey of Tunis, who has the reputation of being one of the four best chess-players in the world, has challenged the Jouffroy Passage Club, at Paris, to a rubber Game for 1000 pounds. The first game has begun.”

Essentially the same article, complete with the reference to the Bey as one of the four best players, appears in *der Humorist* of December 21, 1853, with the match stake given as 25,000 Francs. After his loss, reported on August 19, 1854, *der Humorist* demotes the Bey to simply being an excellent player. The Bey, hereditary ruler of Tunis under the Ottomans, was at this time Sidi Ahmed. He ruled from 1837, when his father died (perhaps from poisoning), until 1855. His reign was marked by a great deal of instability requiring the Bey to balance many competing interests, including those of France, Turkey, his subjects, the famous pirates of the area, and others. (Incidentally, a country ruled by a Bey seems to be called a Beylick.) This Bey was allied with France, and was considered quite progressive, introducing a number of reforms including the outlawing of slavery in 1842 and of the slave trade in 1846. He was quite the darling of the French press when he visited in 1846, though ambassadors of some countries refused to attend the festivities since they did not recognize him as an independent sovereign. A more cynical view regarding the greatness of the Bey is given in the *London Times* of December 12, 1846, and *der Humorist* of December 10, 1846 expresses some skepticism that the Bey really said all the wonderful things attributed to him in the papers.

Another notion of introducing a ranking system more refined than “the champion and the rest” is to allow the notion of regional champions. Although the idea of a United States champion already existed, and champions of some states had already been declared, an unknown player seems to have attempted to declare himself champion of the West, the first regional championship conceived of in the United States. This is from the *Saint Louis Globe Democrat*, November 28, 1875:

“We understand that Mr. John C. Young, of Louisville, KY, is desirous of engaging in a match for the championship of the West. The ‘liberal’ inducements he offers are for contestants to go to Louisville and pay their own expenses, and play merely for the honor. How Mr. Young comes to aspire to the title, we do not know, but he seeming not to be aware whom to challenge, we would suggest that Mr. Hosmer, of Chicago, is the acknowledged strongest Western player, and it would be necessary to defeat him before claiming that title. Would it not be better, however, for Mr. Young to prove his superiority to some of the lesser lights prior to playing Mr. Hosmer? We know of one in Missouri who would be but too willing to play a match on such terms as Mr. Young proposes for the championship, and give him the odds of pawn and move, providing he will come to St. Louis to play.”

If ranking people at a single point in time is difficult, how much worse is it when we rank people across different time periods? In the first half of the 19th century, there are many attempts to compare modern masters with Philidor, both favorably and unfavorably, while towards the end of the century the comparisons were between current players and Morphy. I don’t know who came up with the first historical ranking of greatest players, but I am sure it was controversial! The first such list I found is reported in the *Chicago Tribune* of February 5, 1905: “The *St. Paul Dispatch* has compiled the following list of the world’s twelve greatest chess players, ranking in the order named”:

- Howard Staunton
- William Steinitz
- Paul Morphy
- Alex. Deschappelle
- Francis Philidor
- William Lewis
- A. Anderssen
- (illegible) Labourdonnais
- J.H. Blackburne
- Von H. de Lasa
- Emanuel Lasker
- H.N. Pillsbury

The *Tribune* writer disagrees, saying he would place Morphy first, Lasker at least third, and would find room for Zukertort, Kieseritzky, and Tarrasch, even if Deschappelles, Lewis, Labourdonnais, Blackburne, and von der Lasa were crowded out, and Staunton were placed at the foot. He is particularly surprised at Staunton, whose dodging of a match with Morphy is said to show that he “preserved a ‘bubble reputation’ by not hazarding it.” He also feels that Chigorin, Marshall, Maróczy, and Charousek are at least as worthy of a place on the list as Blackburne.



Out of all my little chess research projects, my biggest goal is to find an early ranking list of masters, one which I believe did exist. It is not clear whether this list was just of British masters, or a more general list. Here are some hints that I have collected regarding such a list.

My first indications that such a list existed came from books by Henry Bird, which are part of the [Gutenberg Project](#) available for free on the web. In these books, I found the following statements. I note that these statements come from different books, which accounts for the different number of masters given in the different quotes. If it is not possible to find these lists, one might be able to use these quotes to figure out how many of the masters died over a particular time interval.

“Of the score or so of English born Chess Masters of the British Chess Association lists of 1862, but five remain, two alone of whom are now residing in this country.”

“The eminent masters of the art of chess, registered in the list of the British Chess Association of 1862, numbered 30, now there are but 10 ...”

“... are names scarcely less familiar than those of the half dozen older masters left, who form the remnant of the little band of twenty recognized masters living in 1854.”

If these quotes, which seem so specific, are accurate, then there were at least two separate lists of masters compiled, one in 1854 and one in 1862. The 1854 list would have 20 names, and the 1862 list 30, approximately 20 of whom were born in England.

I did not find any other reference to such a list until I came across this quote from Paulsen’s obituary in the *London Times* of August 26, 1891:

“Of the list of recognized master of that time [*I believe this refers to the BCA tournament of 1862 — JS*], numbered at 36, there are but six remaining – one dated back to 1846, and another to 1849. Reckoning

the great masters that have sprung up since 1862, we have not quite a third of the leading class of representatives which we could boast of 30 years ago.”

This quote is particularly intriguing, since it not only affirms that there was a master list in 1862 (though with a slightly different number of masters given), but seems to imply that there were earlier lists as well.

I have had almost no luck in trying to find such a list. I did find one list which could be related to the quotes above. When the *Chess Player's Chronicle* restarted in 1859, according to Sergeant they published a list of the 12 leading provincial players, and the 12 leading London players. I do not know if this list is intended to be ordered on the basis of strength in chess, or is ordered in some other way.

Provincial: Ranken, Kennedy, Gordon, Owen, Kipping, Pindar, Newham, Wormald, Wilkinson, Withers, Hodges, Wayte

London: Staunton, Buckle, Brien, Campbell, Wyvill, Slous, Boden, Bird, Greenaway, Barnes, Mongrédién, Medley

Since the subject of early world championship is so popular, let me put in my two cents on the matter here. Before we go on, let me say that before 1886 the world championship was not an official title, and there is no way to stretch a “chain” of champions before this time. Nevertheless, claiming that player X was the best player in the world was a popular pastime in the old days, and we should not deprive ourselves of this little parlor game today as well. To my mind, Philidor, Labourdonnais, Anderssen, and Morphy were sufficiently dominant at some time period that I think of them as champions, while Deschappelles, Saint Amant, Staunton, and others who are mentioned did not establish themselves as sufficiently dominant. However, this is just my starting point for a leisurely argument, and I would hate to reduce the interesting, muddled status of top chess players before 1886 to a simple list of champions and non-champions. I have collected some quotes about the world championship that may be of interest below.

The first quote is from *Fraser's Magazine*, 1840. It is interesting both in verifying that Labourdonnais was considered to be the dominant player, and that any attempt to say that Saint Amant stepped into his place when Labourdonnais retired does not seem to describe the situation as it was perceived then. The entire series of articles this comes from, “The Cafe de la Régence,” by “a Chess-player,” is available on the [web](#). The author signs the piece “GW, November 1840”; I believe this would be George Walker.

“To whom is destined the marshal's baton when De la Bourdonnais throws it down, and what country will furnish his successor? The speculation is interesting. Will Gaul continue the dynasty by placing a fourth Frenchman on the throne of the world? – the three last chess

chiefs having been successively Philidor, Deschappelles, and de la Bourdonnais. I have my doubts. Boncourt is passing, St. Amant forsaking chess; and there is not third son of France worthy of being borne on the books, save as a petty officer. May we hope that the laurel is growing in England? No! Ten thousand reasons forbid the supposition. Germany, Holland, and Belgium contain no likely man. At present de la Bourdonnais, like Alexander the Great, is without heir, and there is room to fear the empire may be divided eventually under a number of petty kings. M. Deschappelles considers that chess is an affair of the sun, and that the cold north can never produce a first-rate organization. I cannot admit the truth of the hypothesis; since we find the north, in our time, bringing forth the hardest thinkers of the day in every department. Calvi of Italy will go far in chess; but so will Szén of Poland, and Kieseritzki of Livonia. The imperial name of the latter is alone a pawn in his favour; but, I repeat, the future is yet wrapped in darkness.”

I found the next quote in the *London Times*, November 16, 1843, though that is not the original source as will be seen. For some reason, it does not appear in word searches, so you must go to page 3 column b. A German translation appears in *der Humorist*, November 23, 1843. This is the first quote I have which shows that at least some people will consider the winner of a forthcoming match to be the world champion. I find it quite plausible that there might also be quotes of this type preceding one of the Labourdonnais-McDonnell matches, but I am not sufficiently well read about chess in that time period to have a strong feeling about how the match was viewed by either players or the public.

Great Chess match between England and France –

The death of Labourdonnais has left the chess throne vacant. Like Alexander, his empire has been divided amongst his lieutenants in France, and the best players in England, and Germany. Amongst the former is M St Amant, the editor of the chess journal the *Palamede*, who has, by general consent, taken the place of his master over the chess-players of France. The English have lost McDonnell, who, on some occasions, fought with advantage against even Labourdonnais himself, but they still possess Mr. Lewis and Mr. George Walker, whose excellent writings have so much contributed to the advance of this noble game. Another luminary has also of late years shone forth in the United Kingdom — Mr. Staunton, the editor of the *Chess Players' Chronicle*, and allowed to be the best player in England. His style is considered to resemble, in a great measure, that of M Labourdonnais, from its brilliant and rapid manner. In a trial of strength with M St Amant at London last spring, he has had the disadvantage, but now, fully relying on his skill, and possessed of the confidence of the English players, he has come over to Paris to again measure his powers with his fortunate victor. The winner of the first 11 games is to be considered the conqueror, and, in addition to the stakes, exceedingly large sums of money have been wagered on the respective champions.

The match is to commence tomorrow in the rooms of the Paris Chess Club, at the Cafe de la Régence, and will probably not be brought to a close before the end of December. It is, of course, impossible to guess which of the gentlemen will eventually wear the laurel, but our wishes, as well as those of every true lover of the noble game of chess, are that the ablest player may carry off the prize — which is nothing less than the golden sceptre of Philidor. Chess has of late years become so favourite as an amusement with the more intellectual circles of society, that the present match excited unusual interest. We have in consequence determined, on attending each day's play, and giving the games, according as they shall be concluded — Galignoni's Mesienger

An interesting comment from the middle of the match comes in *der Humorist*, December 14, 1843. The paper erroneously calls Staunton the winner when he won his 8th game, and adds the comment that now chess lovers know whom to regard as the highest sovereign of their game.



However, Staunton and Saint Amant were not the only possible contenders for the world championship. Bledow wrote a letter to von der Lasa around this time which was printed much later in the *Deutsche Schachzeitung* 1848, pages 306-7, discussing plans for an international tournament which would take place in Trier, where von der Lasa resided at the time. In this letter, he remarks:

“Nun nachstes Jahr sehen wir uns hoffentlich alle in Trier, und bis dahin möge der Sieger in dem Kämpfe zu Paris sein Haupt nicht zu stolz erheben, erst in Trier werde das Diadem vertheilt.”

This translates roughly as: Next year we will hopefully see each other in Trier, and until then the winner of the battle in Paris should not be overly

proud of his special position, since it is in Trier that the crown will first be awarded.

From 1843 to 1851, there are a number of remarks by British players which refer to Staunton as champion. However, even in England, we can find dissenting views. There is some debate over whether Staunton or Buckle was the strongest English player, but the most interesting quote was unearthed by John Hilbert in an article on Buckle, which will be appearing in the *Quarterly for Chess History*. The quote is from an undated chess column of Walker's in *Bell's Life*, and says the game in question comes from a source (*Schachzeitung*), which gives the game in 1846. The column goes over a game, Buckle-von der Lasa, played in Berlin in 1843 or 44:

“1.e4 d5 This is Der Lasa's favorite opening, and he considers it sound; but a player like Der Lasa, considered now by the best judges as the first in Europe ...”

Dating the column precisely would be interesting, since if the column comes from 1846 or 1847 this would be when Staunton's reputation is generally considered to be at its highest point, after he beat Horwitz and Harrwitz decisively. For instance, this quote was provided by Louis Blair, and comes from an 1847 magazine:

“This highly interesting contest [between Staunton and Harrwitz] has been at length brought to a close, and we consider its final result to be of such a nature as indisputably to establish the position of Mr. Staunton as the greatest Chess player in the world. Mr. Harrwitz is a German player, whose rare genius for the game of Chess is well known and duly appreciated”

The following quote, before the London 1851 tournament, is the first use I have seen of the term “World Champion.” It comes from *Waifs and Strays, Chiefly from the Chessboard*, by Hugh A. Kennedy, page 117. The section deals with the upcoming chess tournament London 1851, in which Kennedy took part and did some of the inviting. The second paragraph starts as follows:

“There can be little doubt, I fancy, that all the finest chess players of the day, who can possibly find opportunity to attend, will be attracted by this tourney. The first-rates will gird up their loins, and march with stalwart tread into the lists, to combat, *a l'outrance*, for the baton of the World's Chess Champion, which will be the victor's meed ...”

At this point, the entrants were not yet known; the author envisions the spectacle of a struggle in which “Staunton, Der Lasa, Saint Amant, Jänisch, Petroff, Szén, Kieseritzki, Löwenthal, Buckle, Walker, Slous, Harrwitz, Horwitz, Anderssen, Mongrédién and Hanstein should take part.” Perhaps the fact that only six of those on the list actually played in the tournament itself (if you count side events you might add Jänisch, Buckle, and perhaps even

Harrwitz and Mongrédién) might have eroded the notion that this was viewed as a world championship.

I believe that quite a few people felt that the winner of London 1851 would be viewed as world champion. One piece of evidence was that a party celebrated Anderssen as “Schach-Kaiser” on his return to Germany, although he did not have any particularly strong claim to the title before the tournament. However, this could be viewed as biased; who knows what they might have said if an unknown English player had won? However, I found a second quote coming before the tournament from a truly distant paper, which is available [online](#) through the Missouri Historical Newspapers Project.

Liberty Weekly Tribune, June 20, 1851: Mr Löwenthal, the celebrated Hungarian chess player, left his home in the city a few days since, for London. He goes to attend the grand chess tournament to take place in that city sometime next month, and at which nearly all the great chess-players in the world will attend. The game is to be played for a purse of 5000 pounds (about \$25000) which has been made up for the occasion by a few English gentlemen. The plan is for 32 of the best players to begin 16 games simultaneously, at the close of which the 16 beaten players retire from the contest. 8 games will then be played ... The man who comes off victorious in the game, receives the purse, and is crowned the king player of the world. Who knows but that proud title may soon be worn by a citizen of the Queen of the West - Mr Löwenthal? He has gone to try for it, and we hope he will win the game. Gin. Com.

Nevertheless, it must be remembered that Staunton continued to refer to Anderssen as the second best player in Germany (after von der Lasa) in the tournament book, despite knowing that Anderssen was the tournament winner.

I will end my search for quotes on the world championship at this point. For those who place too much emphasis on these old quotes, note that you can still find quotes from English players touting Staunton as champion after 1851, even though he never again was generally considered to be the top player in the world. Quotes on Morphy as world champion are easy to find. I would be curious to see quotes about other players. For example, there were periods in the 1850s when Harrwitz had an extraordinary match record, and I wonder whether his supporters touted him as champion. Perhaps similar quotes exist about Petroff, Dubois, or other strong players, in newspapers from their own countries.

I will close with an amusing claim to a significant ranking, which I discovered in *Littell's Living Age*, November 17, 1855, pages 427-429. The article is a review of the *Autobiography of Charles Caldwell, MD*. The reviewer calls the book “one of the most ridiculous books ever published in memory of an enlightened man of science and a good citizen,” largely because “Dr.

Caldwell's pomposity and verbosity — his vanity and want of good manners — have amused us as so many relics of a past time.”

Caldwell was an interesting figure, colossally egotistical and argumentative. If he had stronger ties to chess, he would be a great subject for a full article. Caldwell had strong opinions, and made many enemies over his long career, but he also won several distinguished medical prizes. He first came to prominence in medicine for his work on the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. Randolph's grandfather came to prominence for his work regarding the same epidemic, and in fact both men partnered with the well-known doctor Rush at times, though Caldwell had a bitter falling out with Rush. Caldwell wrote many books on standard medicine, and was instrumental in making Transylvania University one of the leading medical schools of the West. He also wrote books on broader subjects such as *A Discourse on the Vice of Gambling* and *Thoughts on the Original Unity of the Human Race*. He was a strong advocate of several non-standard branches of medicine, writing books in support of mesmerism and the first American work on phrenology (perhaps appropriate, since Caldwell certainly had a big head). His more than 10,000 pages of published work also include works on *belles lettres*, fine arts, biography, history, ethnology, and religion. He practiced loud speaking in front of the mirror, because his detractors would frequently try to interrupt him during his public lectures. Caldwell tells a story of how he impressed George Washington with his detailed knowledge of the war; Caldwell certainly felt he knew almost everything.

The chess claim comes in the context of a quote from the autobiography, in which Caldwell congratulates himself for his will-power in giving up, cold turkey, his two relaxations, chess and fencing, when his medical practice started to grow:

“And of my standing as a chess-player, I shall only say that Dr. Bollman (who attempted the rescue of the Marquis De Lafayette), General Harper and myself, were acknowledged to be the three ablest players in Philadelphia, and, as was believed in the time, in the United States. Yet so essential to dexterity in all things is practice, that an entire neglect of those accomplishments for forty-four or forty-five years has utterly deprived me of the last relic of ability in them. So complete is this deprivation that I have even forgotten the powers and movements of the several chess pieces.”

Here we have America's answer to Deschappelles, in arrogance, variety of accomplishments, and strange chess legend of learning and unlearning. While Deschappelles boasted of learning all there was to know about chess in a day, Caldwell boasts about going from world-class player to not knowing the moves. Our #3 chess player (although likely only in his own mind) thus preceded Morphy in rejecting chess as interfering with his chosen profession. An inspiration to us all, at least in his opinion. As for me, when I retire, I still plan to know how the horsie moves.



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